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(54) **EXPANDABLE PLAYSET**

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CPC . ***A63H 33/42*** (2013.01); ***A63H 3/52*** (2013.01)

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See application file for complete search history.

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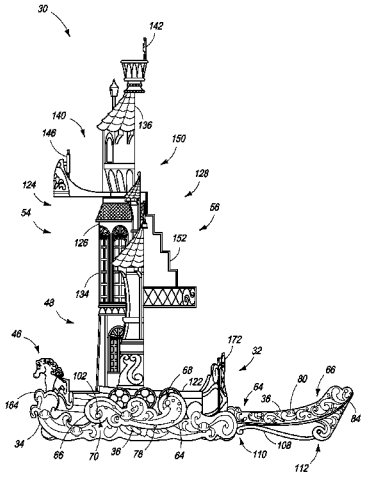
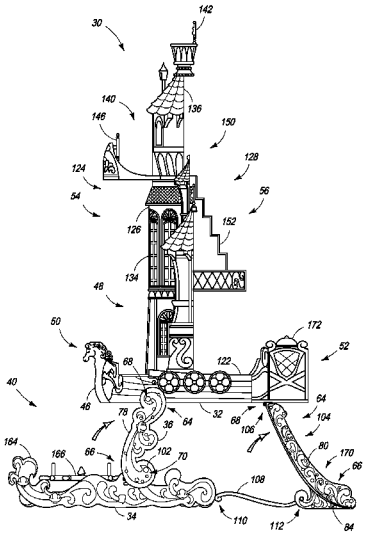
(57) **ABSTRACT**

An expandable playset that provides a setting for imaginative play with character toys. The playset includes a base and a platform connected by pivoting supports and is convertible between a collapsed configuration wherein the platform rests on the base, and an expanded configuration wherein the platform is held a substantial distance above the base by the pivoting supports. A play area is accessible between the platform and the base when the playset is in the expanded configuration, but is not accessible when the playset is in the collapsed configuration.

20 Claims, 4 Drawing Sheets





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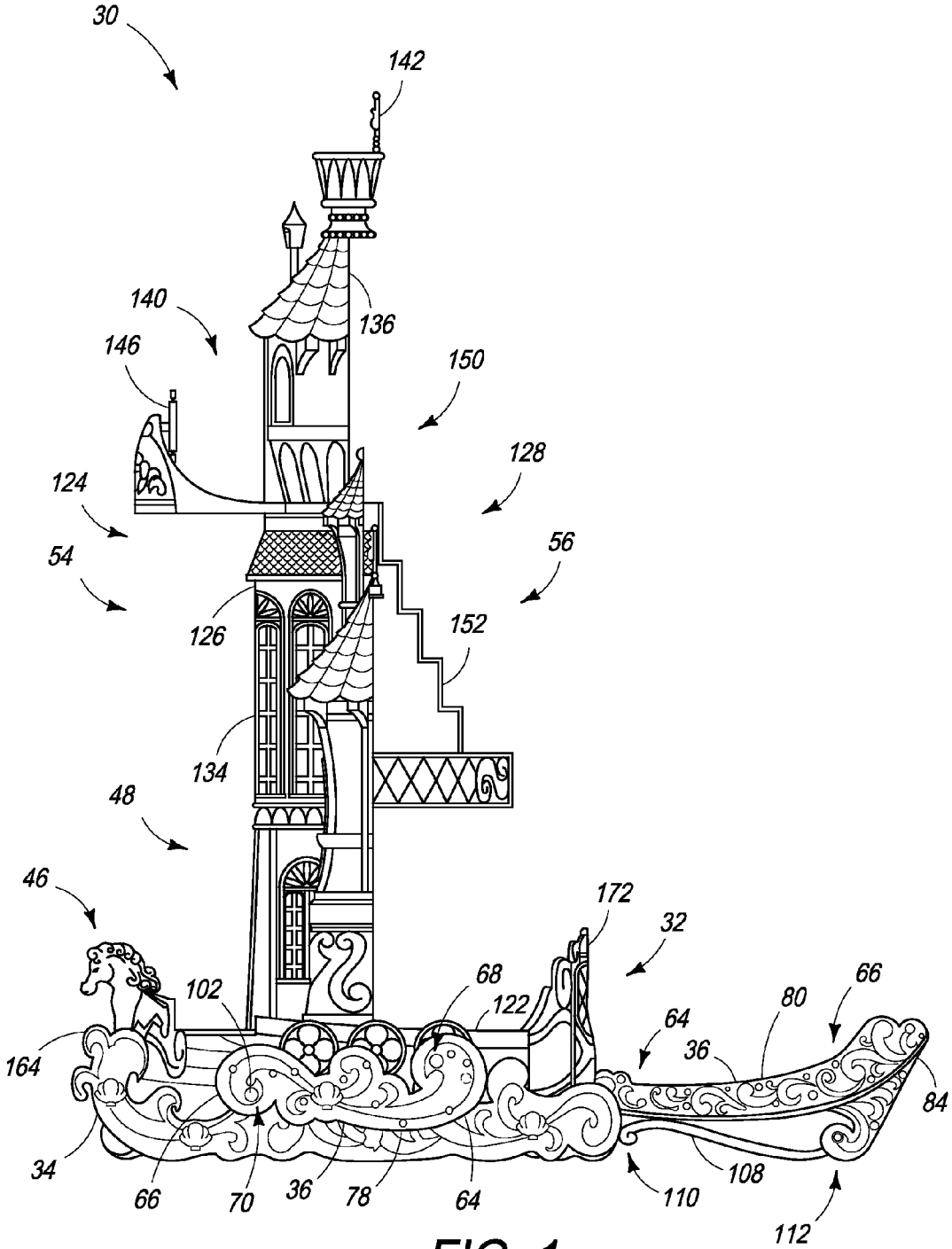
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FIG. 1

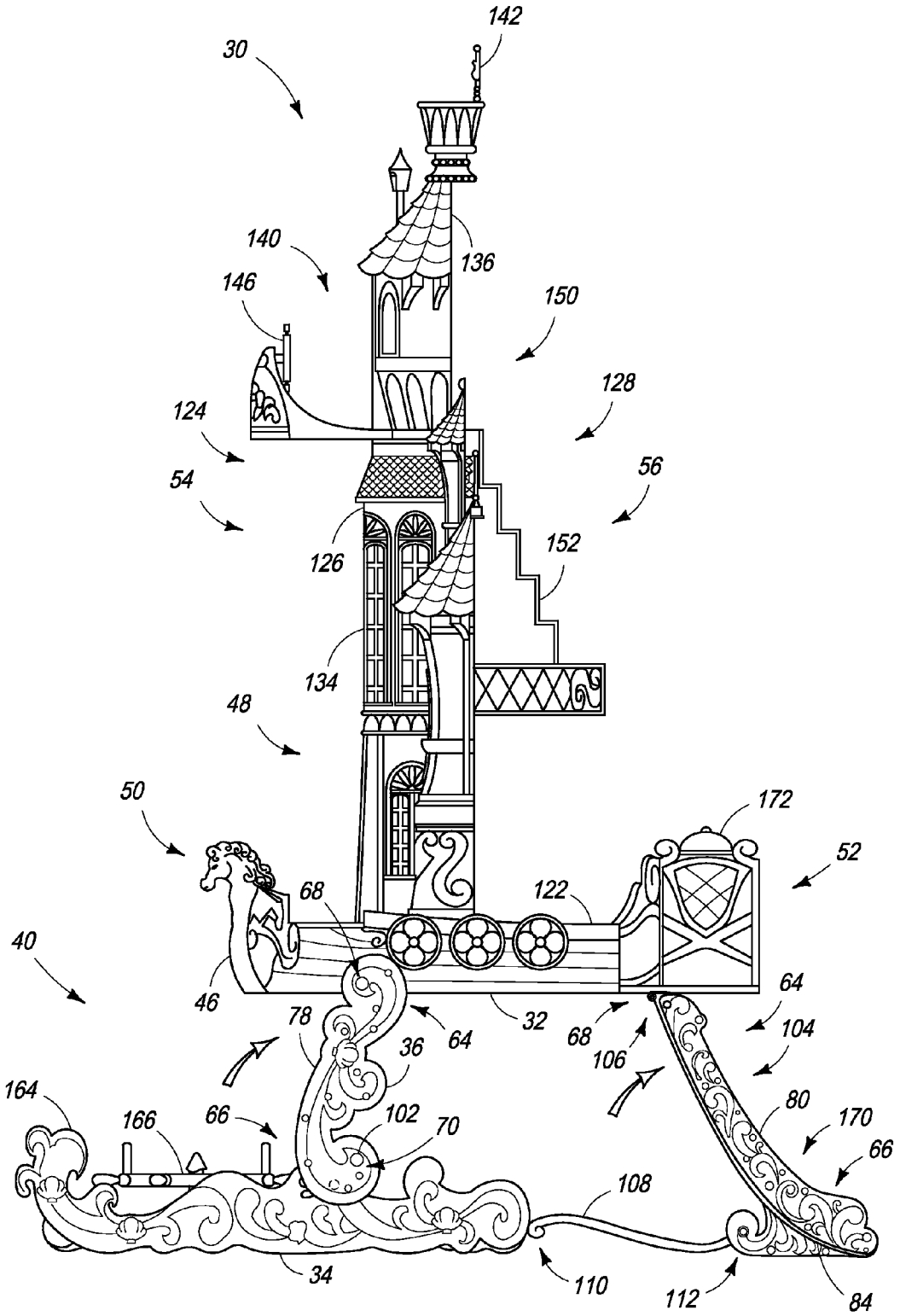
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FIG. 2

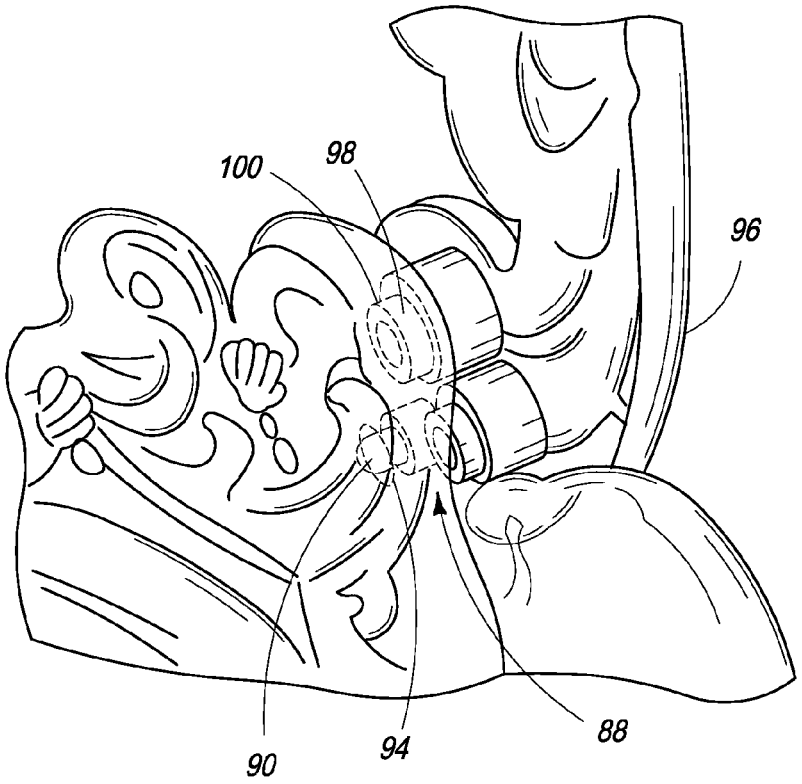


FIG. 3

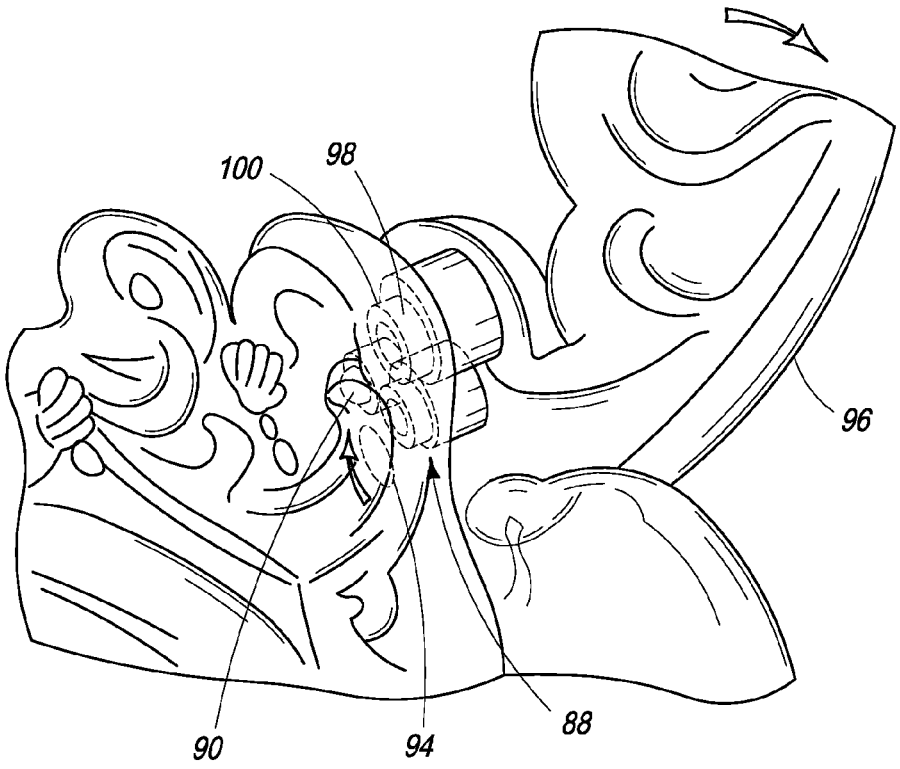
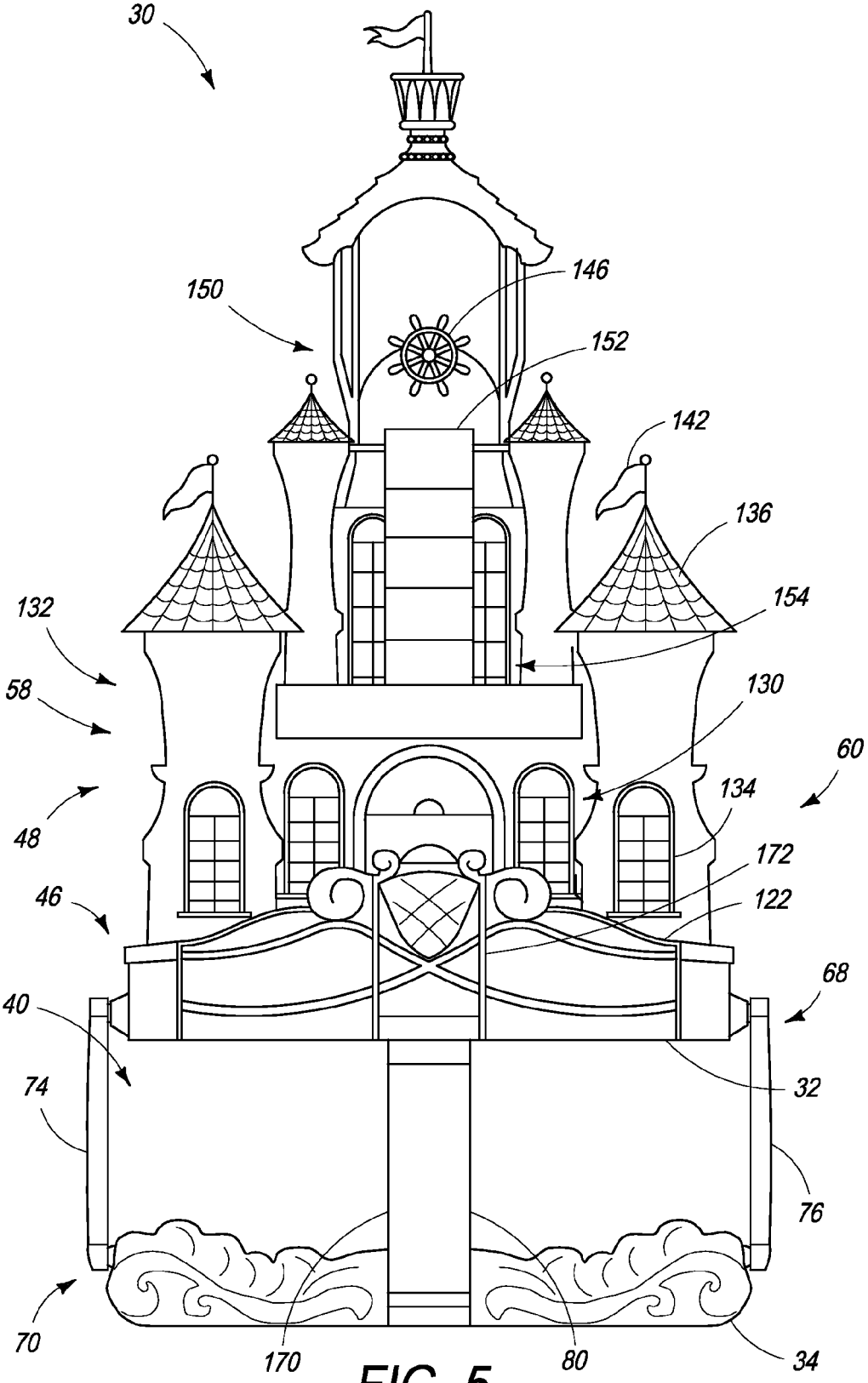


FIG. 4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34

FIG. 5

EXPANDABLE PLAYSET

FIELD OF THE DISCLOSURE

The present disclosure relates to an expandable playset for play with characters, such as dolls, action figures, and other toys. The playset includes at least two levels, a first level, also referred to as a base and a second level, also referred to as an upper platform. The playset is movable into two configurations, a first position in which the playset is collapsed, and the base is hidden beneath the upper platform, and a second configuration in which the playset is expanded and the upper platform is held above the base by a plurality of pivoting supports.

BACKGROUND OF THE DISCLOSURE

Many playsets are available that provide environments for play with character toys such as dolls. Typically, such playsets provide a user a single environment, such as a house; and the user develops imaginative scenarios for character toys to interact in such an environment. A significant advantage is gained if the playset is transformable, allowing a user to expand imaginative scenarios to multiple environments.

Examples of such systems are disclosed in U.S. Pat. No. 4,349,983, U.S. Pat. No. 6,099,380, U.S. Pat. No. 7,618,301, U.S. Pat. No. 7,753,753, U.S. Pat. No. 8,251,224, U.S. Pat. No. 8,328,596, and Patent Application Nos. US20120045965 and US20120276810. The disclosures of these and all other publications referenced herein are incorporated by reference in their entirety for all purposes.

SUMMARY OF THE DISCLOSURE

The present disclosure describes a playset having at least two levels. The playset is convertible between a first configuration and a second configuration, a first configuration in which the playset is collapsed, and a first level is hidden beneath a second level, and a second configuration in which the playset is expanded and the second level is held above the first level by a plurality of pivoting supports. In some embodiments, a pivot connects each pivoting support to a base. Furthermore, in some embodiments, a spring-loaded pin mechanism releasably locks at least one pivoting support in a generally vertical position relative to the base, when the playset is expanded, so that the second level is held above the first level by the at least one pivoting support.

Like many playsets, the playsets of the present disclosure provide a setting for creative play with character toys such as dolls, action figures, stuffed animals, and with other toys such as toy vehicles. The playset may include a plurality of rooms or regions, wherein each room or region may have specific decorations indicating a specific purpose. A child may use the playset to create play scenarios with the character toys.

A child may play with the playset in either of the two configurations. For example, in a collapsed configuration, a superstructure with rooms remains available for play. This same playset may be converted to an expanded configuration, in which a new environment for play is revealed between the first level and the second level. The new environment, in imaginative play, may be considered a secret or concealed place for the character toys.

The disclosed playsets may be open on one side to give a child access to an interior for play purposes. The playsets may resemble a building, such as a residence, castle, barn, or other building. The playsets may resemble any style of building as well, such as a modern skyscraper, a medieval castle, or a Tudor mansion. Further, the playset may resemble a fictitious or fanciful place, or a ship sailing on a wavy sea, transforming into an underwater castle.

Advantages of the present disclosure will be more readily understood after considering the drawings and the Detailed Description.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

FIG. **1** is a side view of an expandable playset, shown in a collapsed configuration.

FIG. **2** is a side view of the expandable playset of FIG. **1**, but shown in an expanded configuration.

FIG. **3** is an isometric view of a portion of the expandable playset of FIGS. **1** and **2**, shown in the expanded configuration, illustrating a pivot that connects a pivoting support to a base, and further illustrating a spring-loaded pin mechanism locking the pivoting support in a generally vertical position, corresponding to the expanded configuration shown in FIG. **2**.

FIG. **4** is an isometric view of the portion of the expandable playset of FIG. **3**, shown in a partially expanded configuration, with the spring-loaded pin mechanism that locks the pivoting support in the generally vertical position, shown here in a not engaged position.

FIG. **5** is a rear view of the expandable playset of FIG. **2**, shown in the expanded configuration.

The drawings illustrate embodiments and schematic concepts for expandable playsets according to the invention. The purpose of these drawings is to aid in explaining the principles of the invention. Thus, the drawings should not be considered as limiting the scope of the invention to the embodiments and schematic concepts shown therein. Other embodiments of an expandable playset may be created which follow the principles of the invention as taught herein, and these other embodiments are intended to be included within the scope of patent protection.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE DISCLOSURE

One embodiment of a playset **30** is shown in FIGS. **1-5**, including an upper platform **32** and a base **34**. Upper platform **32** may be movable relative to base **34** and may be connected to base **34** by a plurality of pivoting supports **36**. Playset **30** may assume a first configuration or a second configuration, with the first configuration defined by upper platform **32** resting on top of and proximate to base **34**, and the second configuration defined by upper platform **32** supported above base **34** by pivoting supports **36**, providing an accessible play area **40** between upper platform **32** and base **34**. Accessible play area **40** may be created by movement of playset **30** into the second configuration, as upper platform **32** may obstruct accessible play area **40** when playset **30** is in the first configuration. The first configuration and the second configuration may be referred to as a collapsed configuration and an expanded configuration, respectively.

Playset **30** may rest on a play surface S when in use, with base **34** being in contact with play surface S. Play surface S may be a table, floor, furniture seat, car seat, or other surface convenient for supporting toys in a child's real-world environment.

Base **34** may include one or more levels, a highest of which interacts with upper platform **32** and pivoting supports **36**. Upper platform **32** may include one or more levels or structures; for example, a lowest portion of upper platform **32** may be fashioned as a boat **46** whereupon a superstructure **48** may

be formed. In this example, boat **46** may be connected to pivoting supports **36**, and may be movable from the collapsed configuration with boat **46** in contact with base **34**, to the expanded configuration. An overall height of playset **30** measured from a lowest portion of base **34** to a highest portion of upper platform **32** may be greater when playset **30** is in the expanded configuration than when playset **30** is in the collapsed configuration.

For convention, a forward edge **50** of upper platform **32** may be defined as the edge of upper platform **32** furthest in the direction of travel as playset **30** moves into the collapsed configuration from the expanded configuration. Conversely, a rearward edge **52** of upper platform **32** may be defined as the edge of upper platform **32** furthest in the direction of travel as playset **30** moves into the expanded configuration from the collapsed configuration. Further, a front **54** of playset **30** may be defined by the part of playset **30** in the direction of forward edge **50**, and a rear **56** of playset **30** may be defined by the part of playset **30** in the direction of rearward edge **52**. An imaginary vertical plane VP, such as a sagital plane or a lateral plane, extending from front **54** to rear **56** of playset **30** defines a central plane of playset **30**, and divides a first side **58** from a second side **60** of playset **30**.

Terms such as "front", "rear", "upper", and "lower" used in this specification serve to aid in description of the disclosure, but in no way limit the disclosure per se. Directional descriptions are provided for ease in description of a single embodiment and the internal consistency of such a description. Embodiments of the disclosure, consistent with the claimed invention, are not invalidated by directional descriptions herein.

Playset **30** and any components thereof may be formed of molded plastic, for example, or from any suitable material or combination of materials.

Playset **30** may include at least two pivoting supports **36** positioned between upper platform **32** and base **34** including at least one front support **78** and at least one rear support **80**. Each of pivoting supports **36** may have a first end **64** and a second end **66**. First ends **64** of the pivoting supports **36** may be attached to upper platform **32**, each forming an upper pivot **68**. Second ends **66** of the pivoting supports **36** may be attached to base **34**, each forming a lower pivot **70**.

Pivoting supports **36** may be arranged in any suitable geometric pattern. For example, three pivoting supports **36** may be employed in an exemplary embodiment, including a first pivoting support **74** and second pivoting support **76** forming front supports **78** and a third pivoting support **80** forming a rear support. First pivoting support **74** and second pivoting support **76** may be positioned on first side **58** and second side **60** of playset **30** at a furthest distance from a midline of the playset. First pivoting support **74** and second pivoting support **76** may be positioned parallel to the midline with a direction of pivoting motion parallel to the midline as well. As the first pivoting support **74** and second pivoting support **76** each rotate about an upper pivot **68** and a lower pivot **70**, each has an upper axis of rotation and a lower axis of rotation. For each front support **78** upper axis of rotation may be parallel with lower axis of rotation. As described, the upper axes of rotation of first pivoting support **74** and second pivoting support **76** may be aligned. Likewise, the lower axes of rotation of first pivoting support **74** and second pivoting support **76** may be aligned. Rear support **80** may be positioned aligned with the midline of playset **30** with a direction of pivoting motion aligned with the midline. Rear support **80** may be positioned medial to and generally equidistant from front supports **78**. Upper axis of rotation of rear support **80** may be parallel with lower axis of rotation of rear support **80**. Indeed, all axes of rotation of pivoting supports **36** around upper pivots **68** and lower pivots **70** may be parallel or aligned.

Pivoting supports **36** may rotate through a partial revolution relative to upper pivots **68** and lower pivots **70**. Boundaries of the range of motion of pivoting supports **36** may be set on a first end by contact of upper platform **32** with base **34**, i.e. in the collapsed configuration, and on a second end by a mechanical stop. The mechanical stop may interfere with the revolution of any, some, or all of the pivoting supports. In an exemplary embodiment, rear support **80** may be shaped with an integral rigid extended foot **84** that acts as a mechanical stop by contacting play surface S when rotated, for example when playset **30** is moved into expanded configuration.

The three upper pivots **68** define a horizontal plane, as do the three lower pivots **70**. These two horizontal planes are generally parallel through an entire range of motion of upper platform **32** relative to base **34**.

Expanded configuration may be made stable by any suitable means. For example, range of motion of front supports **78** may extend beyond vertical, thereby rendering the expanded configuration over-center. Weight of upper platform **32** and any additional force downward on upper platform **32** when playset **30** is in expanded configuration and upper platform is over-center compels rotation of pivoting supports **36** in the direction of the mechanical stop, rather than toward the collapsed configuration. Collapsed configuration may be inherently stable as force due to gravity acting on upper platform **32** rotates upper platform **32** toward base **34** upon which it rests.

Playset **30** may be equipped with a spring-loaded pin mechanism **88** as shown in FIGS. **3** and **4**, to further stabilize either configuration. For example, a pin **90** biased to an extended position by a spring and deflectable against the spring, may be mounted on front support **78**. Pin **90** may engage a recess **94** in base **34** when playset is in the expanded configuration, thereby locking or latching pivoting support **36** in a generally vertical position relative to base **34**. Engagement of pin **90** into recess **94** may provide resistance to movement of upper platform **32** relative to base **34**. FIGS. **3** and **4** show a representative embodiment of the current disclosure; however, an alternative embodiment may include a reciprocal arrangement of pin mechanism **88** and recess **90**. For example, a pin mechanism **88** could be mounted on base **34**, biased to engage a recess on a front support **78**.

Each of first end **64** and second end **66** of pivoting supports **36** may be formed as a pivot by any suitable means, for example, in FIGS. **3** and **4** lower end **96** of front support **78** may be formed of molded plastic and include a cylindrical projection **98** that may fit into a cylindrical recess **100**, in base **34**. Lower end **96** of front support **78** may be attached to base **34** by a fastener such as a screw **102** holding projection **98** in recess **100**. Alternatively, cylindrical projection **98** on front support **78** may be snapped into place with no fastener. Further examples include, in FIG. **2**, upper end **104** of rear support **80** may be secured to upper platform **32** by a hinge pin **106** around which rear support **80** may rotate. Alternatively, upper end **104** of rear support **80** may, instead, include a first cylindrical projection and a second cylindrical projection extending collinearly from opposite sides of upper end **104**, each of which may be positioned into corresponding recesses in upper platform **32**.

Rear support **80** may be attached to a pivoting base extension **108** from base **34** instead of to base **34** directly. Base extension may be connected at a first end to base **34** by a base to extension pivot **110**, and may be connected at a second end to rear support **80** by a base extension to lower rear support pivot **112**. Use of a pivoting base extension **108** allows for a

rear support **80** that is longer than front supports **78**, the length measured between upper pivot **68** and lower pivot **70** of each pivoting support **36**. Further, because of its increased length, rear support **80** travels an arc with a shorter angle measure than front supports **78**. For example, front supports **78** may travel past vertical but rear support **80** may not. The result of this geometry is that in the expanded configuration, the front supports **78** and rear support **80** are angled toward each other, resulting in a more stable structure than if all supports were angled in the same direction.

Upper platform **32** may resemble a boat **46** which may include a superstructure **48**. Boat **46** may include features such as decking and bulwarks **122**. Superstructure **48** may be in the form of a dollhouse and may resemble a residence such as a castle, house, or other structure. Superstructure **48** may include a front **124** forming an exterior wall **126** of superstructure **48** and a rear **128** which may be open and allow access to an interior **130** of superstructure **48**. Superstructure **48** may further include a plurality of building segments such as towers **132**.

Front of superstructure **124** may include decorative, functional, or structural features consistent with the exterior of a residence. These features may include an exterior wall surface **126**, a window **134**, a roofing surface **136**, a gate, a balcony **140**, a flag **142**, or a plurality of any of these features and others. Superstructure **48** may include features consistent with a boat as well, such as a sail, or a steering wheel **146**.

Rear of superstructure **128** may be open to allow access to an interior of superstructure **130**. Superstructure **48** may include a plurality of levels **150**. Between levels **150**, in interior **130**, superstructure **48** may include stairs **152**. Stairs **152** may be rotatable on a vertical axis. Interior **130** may include a plurality of rooms **154**, each with features which may include flooring, windows **134**, furniture, pillars, and other decorative, functional, or structural features.

Base **34** may resemble a body of water with accessible play area **40** resembling a secret, underwater play space. Base **34** may include features consistent with an underwater theme including, for example, waves **164**, a folding seashell seat, or a spinning ship's wheel **166**.

Pivoting supports **36** may be formed with decorative and/or functional features. Pivoting supports **36** may include decorative waves **164** or other features. Rear support **80** may resemble a slide **170** such as a playground slide. Slide **170** may be in a perceived functional orientation when playset **30** is in expanded configuration, and may provide imagined access for play characters from boat **46** to accessible play area **40**. Boat **46** may include an operable door **172** in bulwarks **122** adjacent slide **170** to allow characters access to slide **170**.

While embodiments of an expandable playset have been particularly shown and described, many variations may be made therein. This disclosure may include one or more independent or interdependent embodiments directed to various combinations of features, functions, elements and/or properties. Other combinations and sub-combinations of features, functions, elements and/or properties may be claimed later in a related application. Such variations, whether they are directed to different combinations or directed to the same combinations, whether different, broader, narrower or equal in scope, are also regarded as included within the subject matter of the present disclosure. Accordingly, the foregoing embodiments are illustrative, and no single feature or element, or combination thereof, is essential to all possible combinations that may be claimed in this or a later application.

It is believed that the disclosure set forth herein encompasses multiple distinct inventions with independent utility. While each of these inventions has been disclosed in its preferred form, the specific embodiments thereof as disclosed and illustrated herein are not to be considered in a limiting sense as numerous variations are possible. Each example defines an embodiment disclosed in the foregoing disclosure, but any one example does not necessarily encompass all features or combinations that may be eventually claimed. Where the description recites "a" or "a first" element or the equivalent thereof, such description includes one or more such elements, neither requiring nor excluding two or more such elements. Further, ordinal indicators, such as first, second or third, for identified elements are used to distinguish between the elements, and do not indicate a required or limited number of such elements, and do not indicate a particular position or order of such elements unless otherwise specifically stated.

The following reference numerals appear in the drawings:

30	Playset
32	Upper platform
34	Base
36	Pivoting supports
40	Accessible play area
46	Boat
48	Superstructure
50	Forward edge of upper platform
52	Rearward edge of upper platform
54	Front of playset
56	Rear of playset
58	First side of playset
60	Second side of playset
64	First end of pivoting support
66	Second end of pivoting support
68	Upper pivot
70	Lower pivot
78	Front support
74	First pivoting support
76	Second pivoting support
80	Rear support
84	Integral rigid extended foot
88	Spring-loaded pin mechanism
90	Pin
94	Pin recess
96	Lower end of front support
98	Cylindrical projection
100	Cylindrical recess
102	Screw
104	Upper end of rear support
106	Hinge pin
108	Base extension
110	Base to extension pivot
112	Base extension to lower rear support pivot
122	Bulwarks
124	Front of superstructure
126	Exterior wall of superstructure
128	Rear of superstructure
130	Interior of superstructure
132	Tower
134	Window
136	Roofing surface
140	Balcony
142	Flag
146	Steering wheel
150	Levels
152	Stairs
154	Rooms
164	Waves
166	Spinning ship's wheel
170	Slide
172	Door

What is claimed is:

1. An expandable playset, comprising:

a base for resting on a play surface;

an upper platform movable relative to the base;

at least one front support interposed the base and the upper platform, connected by a front base pivot to the base, and connected by a front upper pivot to the upper platform;

at least one rear support, operably connected by a rear base pivot to the base, and connected by a rear upper pivot to the upper platform;

wherein:

the playset is movable into two positions, including a first position where the upper platform rests on and proximate the base, and a second position where the upper platform rests on the front support and the rear support, distant from the base; and

the rear support includes an integral rigid extended foot that projects upwardly when the upper platform is adjacent the base, and that contacts the play surface when the upper platform is lifted to be distant from the base.

2. The playset of claim 1, wherein movement of the playset from the first position to the second position rotates the front support beyond the vertical position so that the two positions are inherently stable,

the first position stable because force due to gravity acting on the upper platform rotates the upper platform toward the base upon which it rests, and

the second position stable because force due to gravity acting on the upper platform rotates the integral rigid extended foot of the rear support toward the play surface upon which it rests.

3. The playset of claim 2, wherein a spring-loaded, deflectable pin is mounted interposed the front support and the base, and the second position of the playset is further stabilized by engagement of the pin into a recess when the playset is moved into the second position.

4. The playset of claim 3 wherein, the upper platform is supported by two front supports positioned laterally, relative to the upper platform, and generally parallel to each other, and a single rear support positioned generally medial to and equidistant from the front supports.

5. The playset of claim 4 further comprising an extension interposed the base and a lower end of the rear support, wherein the extension has a first end and a second end, the first end pivotably connected to the base, and the second end pivotably connected to the rear support,

whereby the lower end of the rear support rests on the supporting surface when the playset is in the first position or second position, but may be lifted from the supporting surface, by movement of the pivoting extension, when the playset is transitioned between the two positions.

6. The playset of claim 5 wherein the length of the rear support between the upper pivot and the lower pivot is greater than the length of the front support between the upper pivot and the lower pivot.

7. The playset of claim 6 wherein an accessible play area between the base and the upper platform is created when the playset is moved into the second position from the first position.

8. The playset of claim 7 wherein the overall height of the playset is increased by movement of the playset between the first position and the second position.

9. The playset of claim 8 further comprising:

a structure in the form of a dollhouse positioned on the upper platform including a front formed as an exterior of a residence, and a rear being open to allow access to an interior of the dollhouse.

10. The playset of claim 9 further comprising a staircase rotatable on a vertical axis.

11. An expandable playset, comprising

a base resting on a play surface, and

a structure connected by a plurality of pivoting supports to the base,

each support connected to a portion of the structure by an upper pivot, and each support connected to a portion of the base by a lower pivot,

the playset configurable into two positions, a first position wherein the structure rests on the base, and a second position wherein the structure rests on the supports elevated substantially above the base,

the playset biased to remain in one of the two positions by an over-center rotation of at least one of the plurality of pivoting supports, the one pivoting support having a range of motion including two ends on opposite sides of a vertical orientation, one end of the range of motion determined by contact of the structure with the base, and the other end determined by contact of a pivoting support with a mechanical stop.

12. The playset of claim 11 wherein at least one of the plurality of pivoting supports includes an integrally formed rigid extended foot and the mechanical stop is provided by contact of the foot with the play surface.

13. The playset of claim 12 wherein at least one of the plurality of pivoting supports is a front pivoting support with a range of motion including two ends on opposite sides of a vertical orientation, and at least one of the plurality of pivoting supports is a rear pivoting support including an integrally formed rigid extended foot.

14. The playset of claim 13 including two front pivoting supports positioned laterally and generally parallel each other, and one rear pivoting support positioned medial to and generally equidistant from the front supports.

15. The playset of claim 14 further comprising at least one pin mechanism mounted on a front support including a pin biased by a spring to be extended, and a recess on the base, wherein when the playset is in the second position, the pin engages the recess and the second position is stabilized by engagement of the pin into the recess.

16. The playset of claim 14 further comprising at least one pin mechanism mounted on the base including a pin biased by a spring to be extended, and a recess on a front support, wherein when the playset is in the second position, the pin engages the recess and the second position is stabilized by engagement of the pin into the recess.

17. An expandable playset, comprising:

a lower portion resting on a play surface,

an upper portion connected to the lower portion by at least one front support and at least one rear support,

the front support having two ends, an upper end connected to the upper portion at an upper pivot and a lower end connected to the lower portion at a lower pivot,

the rear support having two ends, an upper end connected to the upper portion at an upper pivot and a lower end connected to the lower portion at a lower pivot,

the playset configurable into two positions, a first position, wherein the upper portion rests on the lower portion, and a second position wherein the upper portion rests on the front and rear supports, supported substantially above the lower portion,

the front support and the rear support each having a range of motion including two ends, a first end corresponding to the first position of the playset and a second end corresponding to the second position of the play set, wherein

the two ends of the range of motion of the front support are on opposite sides of the vertical position of the front support, and the second end of the range of motion of the rear support is defined by contact of a foot projection with the play surface.

18. The playset of claim **17** wherein the rear support is connected to the lower portion via a pivoting extension, the extension having a first end and a second end, the first end pivotably connected to the lower portion, and the second end pivotably connected to the rear support, whereby

the lower end of the rear support rests on the supporting surface when the playset is in the first position or second position, but may be lifted from the supporting surface, by movement of the pivoting extension, when the playset is transitioned between the two positions.

19. A playset comprising:

a base;

an upper platform;

a pivoting vertical support extending from a lower pivot connected to the base to an upper pivot connected to the upper platform; and

a pivoting angled support extending from a proximal pivot connected to the upper platform; and

a base extension removably interconnecting the base to a distal pivot connected to the angled support,

wherein:

the upper platform may rest adjacent to the base thereby obstructing a substantial portion of the base from being used as a play area, with the upper pivot adjacent a front end of the base, the lower pivot located generally between the upper pivot and the distal pivot, and the proximal pivot located generally between the lower pivot and the distal pivot;

the upper platform may be translated relative to the base by being lifted above the base, with the pivoting vertical support and the pivoting angled support defining a path of motion for the upper platform; and

the vertical support may be latched in a vertical position to stably support the upper platform in an expanded configuration thereby exposing a substantial portion of the base to allow use as a play area.

20. The playset of claim **19**, wherein at least one of the angled support and the base extension may be disconnected from the upper platform or the base, respectively, or disconnected from each other, allowing the angled support and the base extension to be folded to overlap the base, thereby reducing an overall length of the playset.

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